

WASHINGTON--Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) is the primary co-sponsor and strong supporter of the "Justice for Victims of Torture and Terrorism Act" (H.R. 5167). This piece of legislation was introduced last evening to redress a provision added to the National Defense Authorization Act that would grant the President authority to waive the right of service members who were tortured in Iraq during the first Persian Gulf War from receiving their already-won monetary judgment in court. Following a Presidential veto of the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1585), on January 16, 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives voted on a revised Defense authorization bill (H.R. 4986) that added the immunity provision that gave the President the waiver.

— "The President and Congress' decision to add this provision was wrong. Congress should have voted to override the President's veto, supporting not just the men and women who are serving today by such items in the bill as the 3.5 percent pay raise, but also for those who served previously who have legitimately brought a claim against the Iraqi government because of torture," said Congressman Sestak.

After Congressman Skelton, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, promised to move a separate bill -- the one introduced last night -- to address the concerns Congressman Sestak raised, he voted for the revised defense bill because of the need to support the remaining items which support our military in the overall bill.

"I wore the cloth of the nation for 31 years in the United States Navy, and served alongside and in command of numerous men and women who have fought valiantly and selflessly in defense of their country. Our country must do more to protect the rights of our service members and Veterans when they come back home. And that is what we are doing today with this bill. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues and American POWs in this fight."

On December 28, 2007, President Bush vetoed the National Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 1585), legislation that would provide a scheduled 3.5% military pay raise and bonuses, critical veterans' health care initiatives, and necessary funding for our troops abroad.

The President objected to a provision that would remove some immunity from governments designated as state sponsors of terror by the State Department, including Iraq. It was claimed that such a provision in the law could allow plaintiffs to freeze Iraqi government assets in the United States as part of litigation over actions committed during the rule of former dictator Saddam Hussein, and that would disrupt the Iraqi reconstruction efforts. The Iraqi Government put pressure on President Bush, through its lawyers, by saying it would withdraw \$25 billion

worth of assets from the U.S. capital markets unless the President vetoed the bill.

Congressman Sestak vehemently disagreed with the President's view to waive the right of service members who were tortured in Iraq (such as an aviator who was captured after he had been shot down), to attain their already won monetary judgment for torture.

"Under international law, even when a government changes, the new government is responsible for the actions of the government it superceded. Each month we spend almost \$12 billion for the War in Iraq, and because Iraq has now threatened to pull its \$25 billion invested in the U.S. market—the cost of two months of the war—the President is not going to support the men and women who wore the cloth of this nation that were tortured during a war, and have already won a judgment against the Iraqi government," said Congressman Sestak.

These are the same items that, on December 12, 2007, Congressman Sestak originally voted for and Congress passed. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (FY08), a legislation that represents a compilation of numerous vital provisions to protect of our troops, support of our returning veterans, develop military readiness domestically, and strengthen our security abroad.

This Defense Authorization Act authorizes \$696.4 billion for defense programs in FY 2008, including \$189.4 billion in emergency supplemental funds authorized specifically to support operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terrorism — although other funds in the bill will be used for such support as well.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.